

## Peer Support Program Introduced at ABA Meeting

Members of the national advisory committee introduced the new peer support training program to the Burn Survivors and Support Special Interest Group at the annual meeting of the American Burn Association in Boston. The program, entitled Survivors Offering Assistance in Recovery (SOAR), is designed to provide standardized training for burn survivors or their family members who want to volunteer to help others whose lives have been touched by a burn injury. The program should make it easier for hospital burn centers to work with volunteers in providing peer support for their patients.

The SOAR program includes a screening process to determine whether interested volunteers are “emotionally ready” and capable of providing peer support. Once volunteers are chosen to become peer supporters they will go through an eight-hour training program that covers topics such as: how to work in a hospital setting; the role of a peer supporter — boundaries, ethics, do’s and don’ts; information about the process of psychosocial recovery for both patients and family members; how to make referrals if the patients’ needs are beyond the role of peer support; and communication skills such as active listening, establishing rapport, and paying attention to nonverbal cues. Although the peer supporters will be volunteers, each hospital will send at least two employees to be trained as program coordinators who will manage the volunteers and oversee the program at the local level.



A key component of the SOAR program is evaluation. Patients and their family members who receive support will provide feedback on the process through an evaluation form. Local hospitals that implement a SOAR program will submit statistical data and an annual report that provides information on the effectiveness of the peer support program. The Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors will manage the program at the national level by organizing training and implementation at local hospitals and maintaining a database of information submitted by local programs.

The SOAR program was introduced at the special interest group meeting on April 17, 2001. Six hospitals will implement the program this summer as part of a pilot group to test the program and provide feedback.

The program will be revised based on feedback from the pilot hospitals and will become available to hospital burn centers on a larger scale during 2002. Representatives from a number of hospital burn

centers expressed interest in the program and want to sign up for the next round of training. Amy Acton, Executive Director of the Phoenix Society explains, “We hope to identify five or six hospitals that will go through the second round of training in early 2002. After that we hope to bring about five or six hospitals on board every few months as we are able to schedule the training.”

Linda Ware, OT, of Baltimore Regional Burn Center explains, “We have been doing peer support on

an informal basis at our hospital for a while. We chose to be in the pilot group because the SOAR program offers training and a standardized program for volunteers.” The hospitals in the test group include Baltimore Regional, North Carolina Jaycee Burn Center, Loyola University Medical Center, Spectrum Health Regional Burn Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, St. Joseph’s Regional Burn Center in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Evans Haynes Burn Center in Richmond, Virginia.

The national advisory committee worked for two years to create the program. Members of the committee included health care professionals and burn survivors. Amy Acton, RN, served as chair; Jill Sproul, RN, Santa Clara Valley Medical Center; Cindy Rutter, RN, HealthNet Federal Services; Pam Peterson, RN, Spectrum Health Care; Jim Bosch, BA, Alisa Ann Ruch Foundation; Megan Bronson, MSN, Balance Point, Inc.; Marion Doctor, LCSW, Children’s Hospital Burn Center; Kathy Edwards, PhD, Weber State University; Shirley Massey, MDiv, North Carolina Jaycee Burn Center; and Barbara Kammerer-Quayle, MA, University of California Irvine Medical Center, also served on the committee. The project was funded by the Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors and Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



*Members of the SOAR National Advisory Committee are From Left to Right): Megan Bronson, Pam Peterson, Kathy Edwards, Amy Acton, Jill Sproul, Shirley Massey, Marion Doctor, Barbara Kammerer-Quayle; not pictured: Jim Bosch and Cindy Rutter.*



*Burn survivors learning the role of peer supporter.*



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